

Digital Economy and Emotional Labor: Hyperbolic Self-Expression as a Point of Departure

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Abstract: Research on emotional labour began in the 1970s, and around the same time, "audience labour", an early form of digital labour, was put forward. Therefore, it is likely that the two are related. Recently, research on both has focused more on application, but some theoretical work in digital labour has also been conducted. Although they have taken different research paths, neither has studied the intersection of the digital economy and emotional labour. Based on the cases of food-delivery platforms, paid gaming companions and celebrity variety shows, this paper will use the analytical methods of marginal cost, sunk cost and path dependence. It believes that the digital economy has increased and spread emotional labour. Analyze the psychological problems that people face today and gain more knowledge about the social impact of the digital economy.

Keywords: Digital Labor; Digital Economy; Emotional Labor; Labor Theory of Value

1. Introduction

Recent changes in online language show that people are expressing emotions more hyperbolically. Phrases that once expressed strong emotions, such as "I'm dying of laughter" and "He really...", "I'm in tears," has become common knowledge; people now show their emotions in all sorts of subtle ways. In fact, "I'm dying of laughter" is often said with a serious face, and "He really..." "I'm crying my eyes out" may be a fake smile. A more fundamental problem is whether any expression can exceed "dying". How many times is "ha" appropriate, and will this logic lead to endless accumulation? Emotional expression is therefore out of touch with reality. Although this linguistic phenomenon is more common among university students, it has also begun to appear in public language generally. Therefore, the need for emotional labour has grown in recent years.

Gradually loses the capacity to express emotions in daily life, resulting in silence and the absence of genuine feeling. The digital economy has increased this labour and made it less obvious.

2. Review of Research on Emotional Labor and Digital Labor

Research on emotional labour can be traced back to 1979, when Goffman published "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"[1] and first presented the concept of "dramaturgy" in his study of interaction. In subsequent studies, such as those by Hochschild[2] and others, the idea of emotional labour has been further explored and defined in relation to the management of emotions in daily life. Some applications were added at that time. Ashforth and Humphrey have put forward four types of emotional regulation: automatic regulation, surface acting, deep acting, and dissonant acting[3]. With the development of the service industry, people have begun to pay more attention to emotional labour. Since the beginning of this century, most research has focused on the location of emotional labour in different economic organisations. It has attempted to explain how emotional labour affects the achievement of organisational goals and how organisations can use it to maximise organisational benefits. In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the public service workforce in research. The aim is now to improve people's quality of life at work. Recently, some studies have pointed out that emotional labour can be harmful to people's mental health.

Research on digital labour can be traced back to the political economy of communication. In 1977, Smythe published a paper proposing the idea of the "audience commodity". He held that the attention of the audience was a commodity traded by media enterprises and advertisers, constituting "audience labour" and thus preceding digital labour. At the beginning of this century, Terranova published "Free Labour:

Producing Culture for the Digital Economy" and was the first to explicitly mention digital labour. Terranova[4] employed the concepts of free labour, net-slavery, immaterial labour and the social factory to describe the nature and current form of digital labour. Research on digital labour has grown rapidly with the digital economy. In 2010, Fisher wrote "Media and New Capitalism in the Digital Age: The Spirit of Networks", and through the lens of technological change, he studied network capitalism[5]. Scholz wrote "Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory" in 2013 and put forward the idea of "play-labor"; he pointed out that digital labour has a unity of production and leisure[6]. Fisher and Fuchs published *Reconsidering Value and Labour in the Digital Age* in 2015 and provided more specific details on the characteristics of digital labour[7]. Pupillo et al. have published "Digitised Labour: The Internet's Impact on Employment Relations in 2018". How has the Digital Economy changed labour?[8] Most of the research on digital labour in the past decade has focused on economic theory and applied studies.

Scholars have not yet reached a consensus on the definition of digital labour. Terranova and Scholz believe that digital labour is a non-material form of work; Fuchs, who is also one such case, believes it is material labour. Many scholars have also used the dialectical method. Dyer-Witheford studies digital labour in terms of the relations of production[9], and Allmer applies a dialectical analysis of productive forces and relations of production[10]. Fuchs and Pfeiffer, on the other hand, consider the uses and exchange values of goods[11]. The four types of digital labour generally include professional labour, unpaid labour, audience labour and play-labour[12,13]. Applied research has been spreading to many places. Guo analyzed the annual report of Alipay from the perspective of the political economy of communication[14]. Negri and Hardt distinguish among the following three levels in their definition of immaterial labour: informational and communicative labour, analytical-symbolic labour, and emotional labour[15]. The division may show that digital labour and emotional labour are completely separate. In fact, with the development of digital labour, emotional labour has expanded and intensified, but become less visible.

3. The Digital Economy's Intensification of Emotional Labor

Emotional labour is much older than digital labour. It was also used in the context of providing services and trading goods, such as the ancient merchants' usual pleasant smiles while selling. It is a representative type of emotional labour. Digital labour, on the other hand, did not appear until the rise of mass media, and audience labour took its first form there. However, this later type of labour has also included emotional labour in many areas and increased it significantly.

The first case of a commercial exchange is as follows. Merchants traditionally showed emotion in daily life only when speaking with customers, and not many people were around at that time. Customer evaluations and feedback were only spread through word-of-mouth and had little impact, so the merchants did not need to use much emotional energy. However, in the digital economy, the Internet can spread information spontaneously, and many intermediary platforms have profited from this. Food-delivery platforms are an example. At each stage of accepting an order, collecting food and delivering it, there are time constraints imposed by the platform. The platform also has a function to track the current status of one's order and offers various choices such as 'expedite order', 'cancel order' and 'file a complaint'. The algorithm will change the dispatch plan and time limit for an order. Food-delivery platforms have set different rewards and punishments for couriers based on their work results, and various levels have been established among them[16]. Couriers need to deal with any changes in the customers' emotions promptly when carrying out orders during their work. Algorithms have been becoming more frequent, so this labour is becoming heavier. The reasons are that fixed and sunk costs are rising and marginal benefits are falling. Review Platforms are also products of the digital economy. Collect all the scattered customer comments and then rank them. Merchants need to show more emotion in their work to avoid bad reviews. They should be calm and reasonable in the face of a drop in ratings. With the spread of self-media (independently run online media), merchants must be aware of the risk of public disclosure at all times. As soon as they open for business, all their activities and expressions will be observed and spread. Thus, the stress on their emotions is also considerable.

4. The Unbounded Expansion of Emotional Labor

Finally, the digital economy has spread emotionally labour to almost all areas of life. The three topics in the discussion are: entertainment, games and daily life.

Among them, Bilibili has achieved a good combination of the characteristics of traditional video platforms and those of the new digital economy. It was a subculture area that initially drew the attention of anime and game fans. Later, it took many forms to spread and utilise emotional labour.

Bilibili content creators (UP uploaders) make money from follower traffic. Traditional search will contribute little to the traffic, so we will use algorithmic recommendation. If the content creator were a purely rational person, they would want to maximise income by pleasing the recommendation algorithm and the viewers. The above structure can guide the creation of content by Bilibili. Creators have their own values and other interests. Emotional labour is required to reconcile the spiritual and economic values. Bilibili's achievement system also fosters path dependency. When the number of followers reaches a certain level, the creator will be notified and awarded some special benefits. Creators have quickly increased their fanbases by using the platform's functions, and thus the fans are very devoted to them. If the creators suddenly change direction and produce more personalised works, the number of followers will stop increasing or even decrease sharply. Therefore, the path will be long. The return on self-directed creation is low, and further adjustments to platform policies will gradually increase both the marginal and sunk costs. Thus, there is a vicious circle of emotional labour. Creators do not know how their new works of art will be received. After that content is released, it will start to earn some or all of the expected income. Reduce the vagueness and meet the creators' needs better. Thus it is called freemanship.

With the rapid development of the esports industry, paid gaming companion jobs have also started to appear. Gaming was traditionally viewed as the opposite of work, and people who earned a living through activities such as acrobatics were often regarded as "not doing proper work". With the development of the digital economy, many gaming platforms for

real-time interaction have emerged, and esports have arisen from this development. Most professional esports players are good at it and interested in it. Initially, they are consumers of games and do not pursue them out of interest in other things. However, as paid gaming companions or professional esports players, they are subject to many restrictions from various places. Their behaviour and speech in the game are no longer random but have economic goals, such as winning a game or pleasing an employer. Thus, the division between games and work is unclear, and regular play now involves considerable emotional labour.

Entertainment, especially variety shows, are another type. Variety shows were first held in purpose-built theatres. Homogenisation and involution have increased the diversity of lifestyles. Celebrities' lives are shown on television in these shows. They can no longer do as they wish but must show habits and routines that please the viewers and fans. It is no longer about living and working. There is a demand for off-camera work. Whenever celebrities are in public, they need to be careful about what they say and do to protect their financial interests. Therefore, they have no emotional labour limit.

5. Conclusion

Although emotional labour is mainly a concept in psychology and human resources management, its basic reasons are generally to increase the return for both employees and the investment in their labour. It has begun to affect the allocation of market resources and may be regarded as economic behaviour. The digital economy has broken through the old framework and boundaries of emotional labour and thus expanded and intensified without limit. Therefore, people have fallen into a psychological trap. Humorous phrases such as "open for business" also show that those who profit from contemporary emotional labour have found a way to normalise and justify it. Legitimation and the hidden nature of emotional labour are changing the digital economy and economic personas gradually, so they should be observed closely.

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